

## ALTERNATE LIVES

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## GET INTO THE GAME

Some RPG fans' behavior seems over the top—but isn't that the point?



Strategy gamers bark about how they lost sleep last night playing “just one more turn,” and shooter clans put in exhaustive hours of “training,” but we all know that RPG fans get more obsessed with their games than anyone. Maybe it's the inherent escapism offered by heroic adventures in virtual worlds, or maybe it's the incredibly addictive nature of RPG character development systems. Whatever the reason, many gamers spend dozens of hours a week immersed in RPGs. One of the things I love most about them is that you can often literally spend months play-

ing one without seeing everything it has to offer.

But RPG fans also seem more prone toward unhealthy obsessions with their games, to the point of losing all sense of perspective and balance in their lives. The advent of MMOs has only exacerbated that phenomenon, since MMOs are crafted primarily to reward gamers for putting in time, rather than rewarding skills, to encourage people to keep shelling out monthly subscription fees. It's not uncommon for MMO subscribers to play for more than five hours a day on average, for months at a time. To reach the highest ranks of the PvP honor

system in *World of Warcraft*, some players consistently play for more than 10 hours a day. When *EverQuest* (then dubbed “EverCrack”) was the dominant MMO, Sony Online found itself threatened with lawsuits from the families of addicted players. The totalitarian communist regime of China went so far as to introduce a law requiring MMOs to penalize players who played for more than three consecutive hours. (Yeah, somebody always goes too far for the “greater good.”)

While some players definitely act nutty and unhealthy, most “obsessive” fans enjoy spending their leisure time playing RPGs simply because it's a passionate hobby. They even develop strong friendships with people they don't know outside of the game and play out real-life rituals in the game world; in-game marriages and funerals aren't uncommon. Recently, some fans have even held virtual funerals in honor of other players' real-world deaths. We reported on one such funeral in our last issue (“Massacre in Winterspring,” *PCG* July 2006).

It's a strange phenomenon, and one that a lot of people may feel crosses into the aforementioned “nutty and unhealthy” territory, but memorializing obsessive RPG fans within a game isn't new. My buddy Bill “Lord Brinne” Iburg was a regular contributor to many RPG forums during the late 1990s,

■ The Serenity Now Guild gets medieval on the attendees of a virtual funeral in *World of Warcraft*. Download and watch the full event at Google Video: <http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=-7667194685876573666&q=World+of+warcraft>

and when he died, RPG fans lobbied developers to include memorials to Lord Brinne within their games. As a result, there's a Lord Brinne tombstone outside Britain in *Ultima IX: Ascension*; a Lord Brinne tomb in the Ravenshore area of *Might & Magic VIII*; a Lord Brinne grave in *Deus Ex*; and Lord Brinne's ashes entombed west of Seyda Neen in *Morrowind*. I guess having your death reflected is the ultimate step into the game for an obsessive RPG player.

As we reported last month, Alliance guild Serenity Now recently crashed a virtual funeral held in *World of Warcraft* and massacred all of the attending Horde characters. I submit that the vitriol leveled at them since is completely misguided. Serenity Now broke no game rules—in fact, they actually roleplayed the event to its fullest. By staging a funeral in a contested zone and opting to have their characters attend unarmed, the mourners set themselves up for one of the most memorable role-playing events in MMO history. That's arguably giving the greatest memorial possible to the RPG fan on whom the event was focused. ☹



■ A far more serene funeral service held for a Chinese player in *World of Warcraft*.